Trump berates Democrats as govt shutdown becomes longest ever

Administration sounds alarm over turmoil at airports nationwide if the crisis drags further

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump accused "kamikaze" Democrats of being prepared to destroy the country as the government shutdown became the longest in history on Wednesday, eclipsing the 35-day record set during the Republican leader's first term.

Federal agencies have been grinding to a halt since Congress failed to approve funding past September 30, and the pain has been mounting as welfare programmes — including aid that helps millions of Americans afford groceries — hang in the balance.

Some 1.4 million federal workers, from air traffic controllers to park wardens, remain on enforced leave or are working without pay. Some courts are using emergency funds to stay open, and warning that operations could slow if the shutdown drags on.

"I just got back from Japan," the Republican president told a breakfast meeting with Republican senators at the White House as the shutdown entered its sixth week.

"I talked about the kamikaze pilots. I think these guys are kamikaze," he said, referencing Democrats. "They'll take down the country if they have to."

Turmoil at airports

Hours before the shutdown record toppled at midnight, the Trump administration sounded the alarm over turmoil at airports nationwide if the crisis drags further into November, with worsening staff shortages snarling airports and closing down sections of airspace.

"So if you bring us to a week from today, Democrats, you will see mass chaos...you will see mass flight delays," Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said.

"You'll see mass cancellations, and you may see us close certain parts of the airspace, because we just cannot manage it because we don't have the air traffic controllers." Thanksgiving air travel is expected to set a new record this year, the American Automobile Association (AAA) projected — with 5.8 million people set to fly domestically over the Nov 27 holiday.

More than 60,000 air traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers are working without pay, and the White House has warned that increased absenteeism could mean chaos at check-in lines. Airport workers calling in sick rather than working without pay — leading to significant delays — was a major factor in Trump bringing an end to the 2019 shutdown. Both Democrats and Republicans remain unwavering, however, over the main sticking point in the current stoppage — health care spending.

'Defiance'

Democrats say they will only provide votes to end the funding lapse after a deal has been struck to extend expiring insurance subsidies that make health care affordable for millions of Americans. But Republicans insist they will only address health care once Democrats have voted to switch the lights back on in Washington.

While both sides' leadership have shown little appetite for compromise, there have been signs of life on the back benches, with a handful of moderate Democrats working to find an escape hatch.—AFP

FIRE and smoke mark the place where the cargo plane crashed in Kentucky.—AFP

100 die as typhoon wreaks havoc in Philippines

CEBU: The death toll from Typhoon Kalmaegi in the central Philippines climbed past 100 on Wednesday as the devastating impact on Cebu province became clearer after the worst flooding in recent memory.

Floodwaters described as unprecedented had rushed through the province's towns and cities a day earlier, sweeping away cars, riverside shanties and even massive shipping containers.

Cebu spokesman Rhon Ramos said that 35 bodies had been recovered from flooded areas of Liloan, a town that is part of provincial capital Cebu City's metro area. The grim news brought the toll for Cebu to 76.

On neighbouring Negros Island, at least 12 people were dead and 12 more were missing after Kalmaegi's driving rain loosened volcanic mudflow which then buried homes in Canlaon City, police Lieutenant Stephen Polinar said.

"Eruptions of Kanlaon volcano since last year deposited volcanic material on its upper sections. When the rain fell, those deposits rumbled down onto the villages," he said. Only one Negros death had been included in an earlier government tally of 17 deaths outside Cebu. That figure included six crewmembers of a military helicopter that crashed while on a typhoon relief mission.

'The water was raging'

"Around four or five in the morning, the water was so strong that you couldn't even step outside," said Reynaldo Vergara, 53, adding that everything in his small shop in Mandanaue had been lost when a nearby river overflowed. "Nothing like this has ever happened. The water was raging."

In nearby Talisay, where an informal settlement along a riverbank was washed away. "This will take time because I don't have the money yet. It will take months," he said as he mixed cement and sand atop the rubble.

The area around Cebu City was deluged with 183 millimetres (seven inches) of rain in the 24 hours before Kalmaegi's landfall, well over its 131-millimetre monthly average, weather specialist Charmagne Varilla said.

On Tuesday, provincial governor Pamela Baricuatro called the situation "unprecedented" and "devastating". Scientists warn that storms are becoming more powerful due to human-driven climate change. Warmer oceans allow typhoons to strengthen rapidly, and a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, meaning heavier rainfall. In total, nearly 800,000 people were moved from the typhoon's path.

Seeing ghosts

The catastrophic loss of life in Cebu comes as the public seethes over a scandal involving so-called ghost flood-control projects believed to have cost taxpayers billions of dollars. On Wednesday, governor Baricuatro suggested a connection between the corruption scandal and what her spokesman later called "unusual" flooding in a cluster of subdivisions.

"You begin to ask the question why we're having terrible flash floods here when you have Ph26.6 billion ($452 million) for flood control projects (in the national budget)," she said in an interview with local outlet ABS-CBN. "Definitely we have seen projects here... that I would say are ghost projects," she said, adding her inspection team had not seen a single structure built to government standards.

A spokesperson at the Department of Public Works and Highways, the government entity at the centre of the scandal, said that department head Vince Dizon was already in Cebu to inspect typhoon damage. "After his inspection there, maybe he will comment," they said.—AFP

Nine killed after cargo plane crashes in US

WASHINGTON: The death toll from a UPS cargo plane crashing in Louisville has risen to nine with more fatalities feared, Kentucky's governor said on Wednesday, as search efforts continued and the airport resumed flights.

The McDonnell Douglas MD-11 departing for Hawaii crashed at around 5:15pm on Tuesday, shortly after taking off from Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport. It exploded into flames as it ploughed into businesses adjacent to the airport.

Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear called the tragedy "heartbreaking" and "unimaginable."

"The number of those lost has now risen to at least 9, with the possibility of more," he posted on X. "Right now these families need prayers, love and support." Beshear said in a prior post that 16 different families had reported loved ones unaccounted for.

"A significant search and rescue mission was underway overnight, which is continuing this morning," he said.

UPS said in a statement that three crew members were on board the aircraft, adding that "we have not confirmed any injuries/casualties." Tuesday's crash reportedly was the deadliest in the global package delivery giant's history. Its main hub, Worldport, is in Louisville, where it employs thousands of people. UPS has halted package sorting operations at their facility.

Video shared by local broadcaster WLKY showed the aircraft's left engine on fire as it tried to lift off. By early Wednesday, Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg said on X that aviation officials had reopened the runway.

A spokesman for the airport, Jonathan Bevin, said the cargo flight "went down three miles (five kilometers) south of the airfield" after taking off. UPS travels to more than 200 countries via nearly 2,000 daily flights, with a fleet of 516 aircraft. It owns 294 of those planes and hires the rest through short-term leases or charters.

Aerial footage of the crash site showed a long trail of debris as firefighters blasted water on the flames, with smoke billowing from the area. Beshear said the aircraft hit a petroleum recycling facility "pretty directly."—AFP

Reward offered for return of stolen guns in Bangladesh

DHAKA: Bangladesh announced on Wednesday cash rewards to surrender machine guns, rifles and pistols looted during an uprising last year, hoping to collect hundreds of weapons ahead of key elections.

An estimated 6,000 firearms were stolen from police armouries during the deadly August 2024 unrest that toppled the hardline rule of then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

More than 1,300 are still reported as missing, police spokesman AHM Shahadat Hossaine said. Police issued a list of rewards for their return, ranging from just over $4,000 for a light machine gun to $800 for an assault rifle, and $400 for a shotgun or pistol. Cash would also be paid for ammunition.

"Bangladesh Police guarantee full confidentiality", Hossaine said, urging people to hand them in. Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since Hasina fled into exile last year, and political parties are jostling for power ahead of polls slated for February 2026.—AFP

Putin tells officials to draft proposals for resumption of N-tests

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his top officials on Wednesday to draft proposals for a possible test of nuclear weapons, something Moscow has not done since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

The order, responding to President Donald Trump's announcement last week that the US would resume testing, was a further signal that the two countries with the world's largest nuclear arsenals are rapidly nearing a step that could sharply escalate geopolitical tensions.

"I am instructing the foreign ministry, the defence ministry... the special services and relevant civilian agencies to do everything possible to collect additional information on the issue, analyse it at the Security Council and make agreed proposals on the possible start of work on the preparation of nuclear weapons tests," Putin said in televised remarks.

Russia-US relations have deteriorated sharply in the past few weeks as Trump, frustrated with a lack of progress towards ending the war in Ukraine, has cancelled a planned summit with Putin and imposed sanctions on Russia for the first time since returning to the White House in January.

Putin issued his instruction at a meeting of his Security Council, where parliamentary speaker Vyacheslav Volodin departed from the official agenda of transport safety to ask how Moscow would respond to Trump's plans to carry out nuclear testing for the first time in 33 years.

The question, though meant to appear spontaneous, triggered a series of clearly prepared interventions.

Swift response sought

Defence Minister Andrei Belousov told Putin that recent US remarks and actions meant it was "advisable to prepare for full-scale nuclear tests" immediately.

Russia's Arctic testing site at Novaya Zemlya could host such tests at short notice, Belousov added.

General Valery Gerasimov, head of the General Staff, told Putin: "If we do not take appropriate measures now, time and opportunities for a timely response to the actions of the United States will be lost, since the time required to prepare for nuclear tests, depending on their type, ranges from several months to several years."

No country apart from North Korea, most recently in 2017, has carried out explosive tests of nuclear weapons in the 21st century. Security analysts say a resumption of testing by any of the world's nuclear powers would be destabilising, as it would likely trigger a similar response by the others.

"Action-reaction cycle at its best. No one needs this, but we might get there regardless," Andrey Baklitskiy, a researcher at the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, posted on *X*.

Russia and the US are by far the biggest nuclear powers by numbers of warheads, followed by China, France, Britain, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea, according to the Federation of American Scientists.

No deadline set for proposals

State news agency TASS quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying Putin had set no specific deadline for officials to draft the requested proposals.

"In order to come to a conclusion about the advisability of beginning preparations for such tests, it will take exactly as much time as it takes for us to fully understand the intentions of the United States of America," Peskov said.—Reuters

NEWSMAKERS

KHULM: An Afghan stands in front of his house which was damaged when an earthquake struck Samangan province on Tuesday. The quake left 27 people dead and nearly 1,000 injured.—AFP

THE seized dinosaur fossils on display at Christie's auction house in London.—Reuters

Britain seizes dinosaur bones in crime proceeds case

LONDON: British authorities have seized rare dinosaur bones worth millions of pounds, as well as nine London apartments and a collection of Chinese art, from a Singapore-based businessman in a case to recover alleged proceeds of crime.

Fossilised skeletons of two Allosauruses and a Stegosaurus were among the assets seized by Britain's National Crime Agency in a settlement agreed on Wednesday with Su Binghai and his company, Su Empire Limited, under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

The act lets British authorities recover property deemed to have been acquired unlawfully, even without a criminal conviction. The NCA gave no details of the allegations that had given rise to the case involving Su.

The huge Jurassic dinosaur skeletons, around 150 million years old, had been bought at auction last year at Christie's for 12.4 million pounds ($16.1 million). The auction house released photos of them at the time, resembling a display from a natural history museum.

The 11 Chinese artworks recovered in the case had been bought at auction in 2022 for over 400,000 pounds.

One quarter of the proceeds of the sale of the recovered assets will be paid into a bank account nominated by Su, according to a court order.

The NCA did not immediately comment.—Reuters

SHANGHAI: A full-electric plane, capable of vertical takeoff and landing, on display during the China International Import Expo.—AFP

PARIS: Activists belonging to Mouv'Enfants, a movement fighting against all forms of violence against children, hold a placard which reads as "Protect children, not Shein". Protesters took to the streets in the French capital against the opening of Asian e-commerce giant Shein's first physical store.—AFP

BANTUL (Indonesia): A relative carries a portrait during the funeral procession of Sri Susuhunan Paku Buwono, a ruler of the Muslim Mataram kingdom in Yogyakarta, at a graveyard reserved for the dynasty.—AFP